

MINUTES
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
January 5, 2017 – 4:45 P.M.
TOWN HALL ANNEX – COMMUNITY ROOM 1

I. ROLL CALL

Present: Cote, Dowling, Preka, Young, Melin, Denno, Mathanool (4:56), Legnos,
Brooks
Absent: Hatcher
Other: Nault, Valente, Obrey, Barber
Staff: Bronk, Eisenbeiser

The Chair called the meeting to order at 4:49 p.m.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

December 1, 2016

MOTION: To approve the minutes of the December 1, 2016 meeting

Motion made by Dowling, seconded by Cote; so voted unanimously

III. PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS - none

IV. REPORTS

1. Chairperson – Preka was in touch with staff and commission members throughout the month.

2. Staff – Staff report was previously submitted by email for review.

ADZ – Still awaiting DECD approval.

Great Blue – The consultant will present to RTM on January 11th.

Incentives – The document is in final form and printed copies should be ready soon.

Innovation Places – This project is ongoing, with the initial grant submission due March 1.

Marketing/Web – The RFP was released in December.

Wayfinding signage – The RFP was released in December.

TIF – Staff presented to the Town Council for resolution on Tuesday, December 6th. There are two projects currently that would like to use TIF.

Growing in Groton Guide – A draft of this document to assist new business interests is in draft form and is currently under revision, the final version should be available in print in the next month or two.

Young asked about printed materials and their availability for distributing as part of the business outreach efforts.

Denno asked about the details regarding the manufacturing firm Faria Beede seeking a new facility. Bronk indicated the lack of building inventory in Groton prevented us from being able to meet their needs.

3. Liaisons:

Groton Business Association –Valente announced that Susan Bailey will serve as the new chair for GBA. The annual meeting will be held on the third Thursday in May, any suggestions for potential speakers for this event are welcome.

Downtown Mystic Merchants – Valente noted that the DMMA has a new board and that he will stay on as DMMA chairperson for another year. The mission of the DMMA is to ensure tourists find Downtown Mystic. As the Eastern Regional Tourism Board is funded through June only, the DMMA is discussing what to do to make up for the exposure. Valente also noted that the Greater Mystic Chamber has a new president, a new welcome center and two new sponsors who will be announced shortly.

RTM – Obrey stated that the RTM will be reviewing the town budget. Attendance at Town Council meetings when the budget is on the agenda is encouraged.

Town Council – Barber noted that the Town Council is busy working on finding a new town manager, including interviewing search firms. Significant budget cuts are expected at the state level, and if the money for school is not approved by the state, the school referendum is not valid.

4. Business Outreach:

Preka stated that last month he assigned businesses to contact and asked members to report on their experience at the next meeting. He and Nault visited Rise, reporting that the owners were very pleased with their experience opening up in Groton. Cote visited Homemakers on Fort Hill Road, specializing in in-home care; their biggest need is networking. Legnos talked with the owner of The Sandbox, who is frustrated with financing and construction costs; he is receiving no cooperation from local banks. Mathanool is arranging to meet with CURE Innovation Commons. Melin and Denno were assigned to Curated, which is opening in April. They spoke with Pamela Duggan, one of the owners; she appreciated the outreach but is out of the country and will return on Jan. 20. Valente noted that Peter Duggan lobbied to join the board of DMMA although they have not yet opened for business and is very active in the community. Preka stated that all feedback is encouraged, even negative feedback. He understands the difficulty of dealing with building codes with respect to The Sandbox project.

V. OLD BUSINESS

1. General EDC Discussion –

Cote noted the draft of Outreach form is available; he appreciates any comments on it. Melin noted that among the list of documents, some are not available yet. Cote suggested that there might be more materials we could drop off, such as the EAF guidelines, but we don't need to wait until the documents are all available to continue the outreach visits. He proposed that we take the next step and identify who our customer is. His online search indicated 2,400 businesses in 60+ categories and this needs to be narrowed to the most important business types. We could use assessor information as a start and should create 8-9 categories/groups (mfc., services, etc.) and prioritize them strategically. Cote proposed that we create a task force to create a full prioritized business list and bring it to the full commission. Cote then made a motion that we form a sub-committee.

Legnos asked if the lists will be organized in a higher priority. Cote noted that they need organizing so that we can prioritize strategically. Bronk said that Cote is suggesting that we are more targeted in our approach. Nault asked about visiting businesses outside of town. Bronk stated that the value of the subcommittee is that a discussion could create a better strategy. Melin seconded the motion and offered to join the subcommittee. Motion carried. Nault offered to help as well.

2. Annual Report Recommendations

Preka proposed that we narrow to three priorities for 2017: Business outreach, creating subcommittees (EAF and others as needed) and organize who will attend various meetings to represent the EDC as liaisons. Dowling agreed.

Melin asked who is responsible for organizing various self-directed groups and how might we pull in the same direction. Young made a motion to set up a task force to identify which meetings to support. Legnos asked which groups Melin was referring to. Preka cited the DMMA, GBA as examples, totaling about 6-7. He said the opportunity is that a member would attend a meeting and then report to the EDC if something needs attention. Young noted that the liaisons are regular attendees at the EDC meetings and we should support their meetings with our attendance. Nault said that some meetings have value and we should focus on targeted issues. Valente stated that attending the GBA meetings is the opportunity to speak one-to-many; an EDC member could get on the agenda, mention the Outreach Form and collect data from multiple businesses at the meeting.

Melin asked, how to do we help the groups to prioritize so organizations are working together? Cote asked, do we send the same person to the same meeting every month, or do we mix it up so people get to see what is going on? He suggested that a subcommittee could make a recommendation and then the EDC can vote. Nault said the biggest impact would be by attending Zoning and Planning at City, Town and Noank, to make EDC known and find out if these commissions are being business-friendly.

Legnos asked what the timetable is on the Zoning Regulation overhaul. Bronk said it's happening in incremental changes. The latest challenge is approving the WRPD which will be decided in the next few months. This is the example of how the EDC might have some influence. Last year the vice-chair of Planning met with EDC and had no issues with the status quo, unaware of the impact that the WRPD has on economic development. Nault noted that there are no current vacancies on Zoning Commission.

At the Jan. 4 workshop, GOSA was vocal about increasing restrictions and there was little advocacy for business interests. Young made a motion that we create a task force that establishes recommendations on a calendar noting what meetings EDC should attend on a regular basis. Cote seconded. Melin said it would be useful to see what EDC can do to help organizations work together; Young agreed. Motion carried. Preka stated that we need a task force; he and Obrey volunteered to join with Young. Bronk noted that all task force meetings need to be posted and that task force leaders should coordinate with staff with dates of meetings. Young asked if the task forces can have staff to help with the meetings. Bronk confirmed that staff should take minutes and will be made available as needed.

Preka stated that we will accept ideas of proposed speakers in two to three months.

Preka asked about any other recommended changes in the annual report. Dowling said that we need to change name of Town Council Liaison and that there are other edits needed. She is coordinating with staff for a new revision by Jan. 24 and that staff will help distribute. Preka said we need to approve before it goes to Town Council. Cote noted that we did approve it with the exception of the recommendations. Dowling made a motion to approve it with the recommendations just discussed. Melin indicated that the recommendation of employing subcommittees is just administrative and should not be included. Young stated that the recommendation of employing subcommittees refers to the EAF. Young seconded. Motion carried.

VI. NEW BUSINESS

1. Economic Assistance Fund

Bronk noted that the EAF has a balance of funds available. In 2016, funds were spent on Gabriele's. The program was historically not well-defined and not promoted, but the Town Council always funded it annually. The objective of the revision was to broaden and make more flexible. This fund is necessary as the market analysis indicated that future growth will come from small businesses.

Nault referenced the proposed administrative approval, noting that at the \$10,000 allocation level, RTM approval is required. Mathanool suggested that we lower the amount to \$9,500. Preka pointed out that the draft reads 'under \$10,000'; Nault found that acceptable. Young suggested that when this is brought to the Town Council it should be noted that the goals of transparency and accountability have been achieved with this revision. She suggested that a formal report be compiled at the end of each year outlining who was provided funds and who was denied.

Bronk confirmed that the subcommittee will inform the EDC of the status of each application. Melin suggested that we add Thames Street as a preferred location; Bronk agreed. Bronk suggested we should revisit the guidelines yearly or more often at the start as needed. Young noted that if the Town Council approves and a standing subcommittee is needed, then a bylaw should be added to require a standing subcommittee. Nault said we should hold a public hearing to get more publicity.

2. Greater Mystic Chamber Liaison

Preka asked about inviting a member from GMCC. Young made a motion that we invite a liaison from GMCC; Dowling seconded. Mathanool noted that GMCC turned it down earlier so as not to alienate Stonington. Preka said we can invite them and leave it up to them. Nault asked, what about inviting the Eastern Chamber or Young Professionals. Preka said the strategy is to keep it locally-focused. Motion carried. Preka will reach out to GMCC. Melin asked, has there ever been one meeting with all organizations? Bronk said no.

V. ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn at 6:21 p.m. was made by Legnos, seconded by Cote; so voted unanimously.

Dave Cote, Secretary
Economic Development Commission

Prepared by Lauren Post
Office Assistant II